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Competition-winner Greensky Bluegrass at Humbrews Wednesday

Myles Cochrane/Tri-City Weekly
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What: Greensky Bluegrass

Where: Humboldt Brews, 856 10th St., Arcata

When: 9:30 p.m. Wednesday

Admission: \$10, 21+

Competition-winner Greensky Bluegrass at Humbrews Wednesday

Wednesday will be Greensky Bluegrass' first time playing the new music room at Humbrews, though they've seen the new room through some of its developing stages.

Out of Michigan, this five-piece will compete for your admiration -- and they'll probably get it. And they don't shy from competition. In 2006 they won the Telluride Bluegrass Festival Band Competition and earned a spot on the main stage at the 2007 festival. They've been gracing main stages with their sweet 'grass ever since.




"I remember we had won the contest and 20 minutes later I was being introduced to Tim O'Brien backstage," said Greensky Bluegrass bassist Mike Devol. "It was kinda unreal for me. He wouldn't remember, but I sure as hell do."

Those attending Wednesday's show at Humbrews will definitely witness a show to remember.

"I think we played three consecutive Halloweens in the area -- that makes for an interesting experience anywhere," Devol said. "Arcata has a way of embracing the holiday, too. Some really creative costumes. We didn't hold back ourselves. One Halloween Humbrews hosted Bach, Alice Cooper, MC Hammer, Pigpen and Jon Fishman on the stage together. That was the first (and so far the last) time that I have handed my bass off to Dave

[Bruzza] (our guitar player) to rap 'Can't Touch This' and break into a hammer-time dance solo at the front of the stage."

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These guys came to bluegrass from the wild side of rock 'n' roll.

"From the Grateful Dead and Phish," Devol said. "We are Midwest boys not steeped in the sweet harmonies of Appalachia. Instead we grew up listening to everything else: punk, grunge, classic rock, electronic, jazz, classical, whatever."

Greensky has gotten the chance to share the stage with some of their Grateful Dead heroes, Mickey Hart and Bill Kreutzmann.

"Playing with Mickey and Bill last summer came as kind of a surprise," he said. "For me it was powerful to have drummers period. As a bluegrass player, I am pretty much the drum kit. Having been relieved of this role by not one, but two drummers, both from the Grateful Dead

was pretty mind-blowing! I spent a good deal of that sit-in enjoying the looks on my band mates' faces. Sheer joy."

Greensky Bluegrass plays traditional 'grass with a mix of those rock influences and a touch of experimentation. They'll also throw a few cover curveballs at Humbrews on Wednesday night.

"It's fun to put our own stamp on songs that we really love and some that we don't really love," Devol said. "I've always been surprised at what cheesy 80s songs make great bluegrass covers."

Devol and company have been known to grace the stage with both catchy three-minute tracks and sometimes captivating 10-minute improv jams.

"It's really exciting to achieve a state of listening and connecting that sort of takes you to a place that you have never

been before and can never go again," he said. "It's always different and it's very rewarding. The more we play together the more interesting these jams are becoming."

Greensky will unveil some new tunes to Humboldt Wednesday.

"We're currently mixing a new album entitled 'Handguns' that we recorded in Lansing, Michigan in the second half of January," Devol said. "It should be out in a few months. It's our first studio project since 2008's 'Five Interstates' and it's sweet! We're stoked."

The guys will continue to provide a sound that surpasses the confines of traditional bluegrass and wows a growing bluegrass crowd in the U.S.

"The popularity of indie bands in today's music scene is great for a breaking down of conventional genre labels," Devol concluded. "People who were always into everything else are suddenly in love with some band that has a banjo in it like Mumford and Sons. While I wouldn't compare what we do to them, they are no doubt making it fashionable to play string music. Fashionable is something that this genre has never been. We'll keep doing what we do and we hope that we can continue to connect with new audiences young and old."

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